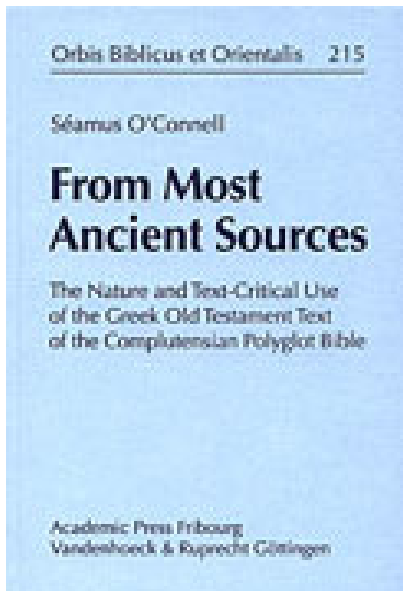


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O'Connell, Séamus

From Most Ancient Sources: The Nature and Text-Critical Use of the Greek Old Testament Text of the Complutensian Polyglot Bible

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In this doctoral dissertation (University of Fribourg, 1995) on the Complutensian Polyglot (CP), Séamus O'Connell describes an interesting chapter in the history of the Greek Bible, a chapter that has received little attention in scholarship. He begins by reviewing the historical background and origins of CP, the great endeavor led by Cardinal Cisneros during the first decades of the sixteenth century in Spain. In this introductory part of the study, O'Connell relies on the work of others, quoting lengthy passages from them, but since this area of scholarship is mainly written in Romance languages, it is a service to many of us not so well versed in those languages to repeat the facts in English. And it is a most interesting story of great Renaissance scholars and printers at their work, of manuscripts having been copied and sent from other countries, and of traces left by the editors on manuscripts. It is amazing how many details of what really happened have been preserved until the present day.

The actual research in this book deals with the Septuagint column of CP. The questions O'Connell wishes to answer concern the manuscripts used as the basis for the Greek column as well as the editorial principles followed by the scholars when preparing this part of the polyglot. The emphasis lies on the latter, but obviously not very much can be said about editorial principles without consulting the manuscripts. O'Connell did, indeed,

examine the actual manuscripts—not just use their collations in critical editions—and has interesting details to tell about them. The study consists of an introduction and five chapters, one on each of the four volumes of CP—volume 1, containing the Pentateuch; volume 2, Joshua–2 Chronicles; volume 3, Ezra–Nehemiah, Tobit, Judith, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Qoheleth, Song of Songs, Wisdom, Sirach; volume 4, the Prophets, Lamentations, Baruch, Epistle of Jeremiah, Daniel, 1–3 Maccabees—with an extra chapter dedicated to the second tabernacle account in Exodus.

O’Connell proceeds by what he calls “soundings,” that is, by going through text samples from each of the biblical books, listing all the deviations from the manuscripts known to have been used by the editors, investigating influences from Greek manuscripts as well as the MT and the Vulgate, and exploring the editorial principles employed in correcting the text of the source manuscript. The overall result is that the intensity of the editorial work varies between the different books and parts of books. According to O’Connell, one of the main factors behind the variation is that the editors could switch the roles of the manuscripts used as the main source or sources for correction. In fact, O’Connell emphasizes this feature as a major characteristic of the editorial work in CP, which has escaped the attention of most scholars—except for Margolis.

On the basis of his investigation of the text samples from Genesis, O’Connell describes the editorial principles in six points:

- i) non-modification of the Greek when both MS sources agree; ii) the transfer to the secondary source when it better renders MT or Vulgate; iii) the modification of the Greek when there are sufficient grounds within the context; iv) a concern for Greek style which sometimes leads to spontaneous stylistic changes; v) an awareness that the text has been damaged in transmission and that recourse to MT or Vulgate is necessary to correct it; vi) the correction of the text aimed at being as non-disruptive as possible.

To a large extent, this description holds true also with regard to the rest of CP. Most of the time the editors seem to have followed these very same principles. It is worth noting that the MT was an important criterion for the editorial work, and the Vulgate was used as a kind of guide to it in cases where the Greek witnesses were divided.

In volume 1 and most of volume 2, MS 108 could be established as the main source for the text. This is, in fact, not new. With more or less emphasis, it has been stated before in Wevers’s critical editions and Sáenz Badillos’s study on the work of the Hellenists of Alcalá. According to O’Connell, the editors, however, used this manuscript in volume 1 alternatingly with another now-lost manuscript, which would have been close to the

group *f* in Wevers's Pentateuch editions. The assumption of a lost source manuscript is naturally practical, because it is possible to attribute to this one manuscript all the features that cannot be explained by the known manuscripts and thus to reduce the number of free editorial changes. The present writer cannot help being skeptical about the lost manuscript, agreeing thus with Wevers's estimate of the matter. There is probably no need to emphasize the editors' reservations toward correcting the text of their manuscripts independently. It is also difficult, if not impossible, to bring conclusive evidence for the use of a lost manuscript, for the simple reason that there are so many variable factors involved. First, why should the number of manuscripts be restricted to two? Second, how is one to tell the difference between corrections supported by a lost manuscript and free editorial changes? Any special reading of CP can easily be explained as editorial: there are stylistic changes and approximations to the Hebrew text, and there is influence from the Vulgate. Third, as O'Connell himself emphasizes, certain variation in the editorial praxis can be attributed to different persons with different skills having worked on different parts of CP.

In volume 3, the basic source used was MS 248, whereas MS 108 and supposedly MS 442 (see below) were used for correction. In the Psalter, the main source, MS 1670, was corrected with the help of the Gallican Psalter. As for volume 4, only the editing of Ezekiel is investigated and in particular the relationship of Pap. 967 to CP. As far as the other prophetic books are concerned, O'Connell regrets the lack of any knowledge about the source manuscripts used by the editors. He refers to the "preliminary" investigations of the Minor Prophets column by Ziegler and Fernández Marcos but does not undertake any "soundings" himself. The author closes with a remark about future investigations into the prophets in CP, as if the study would have been interrupted at this point before having been finished. The reader wonders why. The "unsolved problem" of the sources of volume 4—so called already by Delitzsch—was mentioned in the introduction, and the methods used by earlier scholars in investigating this matter were criticized for not having produced any results on the sources of volume 4 so far. The reader expects the study at hand to bring a solution to the problem. On the basis of the investigation into the editorial techniques used in volumes 1–3, on the one hand, and the critical editions by Ziegler in the Göttingen series, on the other, one could have expected O'Connell to have the necessary prerequisites to attempt the final step. One can only regret that it was not yet time for this breakthrough.

In the course of the investigation, O'Connell repeatedly refers to the unevenness of the editorial measures in the various parts of CP, even parts of books. These differences are often attributed to different persons with different language skills having worked rather independently on different parts of the text. In his conclusions, O'Connell also gives estimates of the Hebrew knowledge of each of the editors having worked on the text.

Some of them supposedly had hardly any knowledge of Hebrew; some others receive a better score. What the actual language skills were and to what extent they can be discerned in the end product is difficult to tell, but it is a fact that there was at least one Hebrew expert on the editorial team. On the other hand, O'Connell pays very little attention to the kind of challenge posed by the Hebrew text in the various parts of the Old Testament. There are *cruces interpretum* that remain unexplained with all the knowledge we have today in our dictionaries and commentaries. How could the Renaissance scholars deal with such cases? Furthermore, there are books and passages in which the Septuagint was translated from a *Vorlage* so different from the MT that it is hard to locate the corresponding passages—unless one has a search program. The question that arises in the mind of the reader is whether such differences between the Hebrew and the Greek texts—that is, a greater need for textual criticism—played a role in what appears as intensified editorial measures on the surface. And what about the character of the manuscript used as the main source? It may also vary, as is the case with MS 108, which is part of the Lucianic recension in the historical books. Hexaplaric features, as in the case of MS 248, naturally bring a manuscript into closer agreement with the MT, which is the main criterion of editing, and thus reduce the need for editorial measures.

It is most interesting to see what kinds of strategies were followed in the second tabernacle account, a passage that must have been a nightmare for the editors. The order and the length of the Greek text are so different from the Hebrew that it is impossible to produce a Greek text that corresponds to the MT by cutting and pasting. The vocabulary of the passages also abounds with technical terms for the different parts of the tabernacle. Clever enough, the editor made use of the corresponding passages in the first tabernacle account when formulating the missing verses, as was also suggested by Detlef Fraenkel. The editor actually produced a new translation (not a “retroversion,” as repeatedly maintained by O'Connell) in the style used in the other parts of the Septuagint. To my mind, it is perfectly sufficient to explain this procedure as conditioned by the special circumstances in the second tabernacle account, and it is not necessary to postulate different hands at work here.

Another special area is Samuel–Kings, where MS 108 is part of the Lucianic group, often representing unique readings. The other manuscript source is supposed to be a copy of MS 68, sent to Cisneros by the Venetian Senate, namely, MS 442, which is no longer accessible. As a result of his soundings, O'Connell concludes that the text of the Septuagint column in volume 2 can be fully explained by the use of MSS 108 and 68/442. It could, however, be equally well explained by the use of almost any manuscript along with MS 108, because divergence from MS 108 very often takes place in cases of unique readings or *L* readings. There is no conclusive textual evidence for the use of MS 68/442 in particular. On the other hand, one wonders how it was possible for the editors to

distinguish and submerge the unique readings of MS 108 or the *L* group. For one thing, they must have strongly relied on the MT (or the Vulgate as a translation of it). The numerous additions of MT plusses and omissions of Septuagint plusses confirm this. But it would be most natural also to assume that they consulted more than just two manuscripts. A look into a third one would immediately reveal which readings were unique.

The subtitle of the work at hand mentions two things: *The Nature and Text-Critical Use of the Greek Old Testament Text of the Complutensian Polyglot Bible*. The nature of the editorial work and of the text of the Greek column resulting from it, at least in volumes 1–3, becomes very clear to anyone going through O’Connell’s study. It is no easy reading, however, if one wishes to look into each and every example listed. On the other hand, very little is said about the text-critical use of CP. And this is correct: CP is undoubtedly an important early landmark in biblical studies and a witness to the scholarship of its time, but certainly no witness of the textual history of the Septuagint.

One more remark needs to be made on the finishing touch—or the lack of such. The present writer is fully aware of her own flaws in writing English but, nevertheless, dares to make a critical remark. The volume displays a need for language checking, or, as it often seems, corrections were not made properly. Proofreading should have been taken more seriously, as there are numerous fatal printing errors, not only in English words and phrases but also in textual examples, in Greek and Hebrew readings as well as in verse numbers.